

How Can I Become a Certified Peer Counselor?

WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS TO QUALIFY AS A CERTIFIED PEER COUNSELOR?

Certification has three steps: apply and be accepted to a training, successfully complete a 40-hour approved training, and pass the state exam. Beginning in July of 2016, you will need to complete an online class and send in completion certificates with your application. Upon passing the CPC test, individuals receive a letter confirming they have met certification requirements. It should be noted that many employers also require licensure from the Department of Health as an Agency Affiliated Counselor after being hired. Employers are generally knowledgeable about this process, or employees may contact the Department of Health directly. This licensure is only required for individuals providing Medicaid billable services.

WHAT ARE THE APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS?

Applicants must meet these criteria:

1. Identify as a consumer of mental health services as defined by WAC 388-865-0150/
 - “Consumer” means:
 - A person who has applied for, is eligible for, or who has received mental health services.
 - For a child under the age of thirteen, or for a child age thirteen or older whose parents or legal guardians are involved in the treatment plan, the definition of consumer includes parents or legal guardians.
2. Be 18 or older
3. Have completed a high school diploma or hold a GED (This requirement may be waived or delayed in some circumstances)
4. Be in mental health recovery for at least one year
5. Demonstrate qualities of leadership
6. Demonstrate proficiency in reading comprehension and writing skills

WHAT IF I AM A PEER WITH CO-OCCURRING OR CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY ISSUES?

Currently, licensing and training are only available to peers with mental health challenges.

Individuals with co-occurring disorders qualify for the training; however, those with solely chemical dependency issues do not. The reasons for this exclusion are related to funding and Medicaid rules. Washington is actively seeking approval for chemical dependency peer support in alignment with our value of behavioral health integration.

WHERE DO I FIND AN APPLICATION?

Obtain the training application, available online at the BHSIA website peer support website:

<https://www.dshs.wa.gov/bhsia/division-behavioral-health-and-recovery/peer-support> or from the DBHR. The application includes an **instruction page**, which should be followed carefully.

HOW DO I APPLY FOR TRAINING?

When CPC trainings are posted on the peer support webpage, you may send your application (and completion certificates for the online class after June 2016). Once your application is received, it will be reviewed and scored. Applications which are incomplete or do not meet training qualifications are returned. Trainers will contact you regarding class openings or if a class fills.

WHAT CAN I DO IF MY APPLICATION IS NOT APPROVED?

You may send a request to DBHR asking to have your application reconsidered. You may also send a new application. A second person at DBHR will look at your application and will let you know if it is approved.

HOW DO I COMPLETE AN EXCEPTION TO EDUCATION REQUIREMENT LETTER?

Applicants who have not received a high school diploma or GED may apply for an educational requirement exemption. Applicants must write their own letter of request, without help. The letter should explain the circumstances that have prevented them from completing the educational requirement, describe how they have gained comparable reading and writing abilities, and outline their plan to complete the education requirement. The letter must demonstrate high school level writing skills. Letters should be sent to DBHR.

HOW ARE TRAINING PARTICIPANTS CHOSEN?

When trainings are scheduled, participants are invited using various criteria, such as those already employed, those living in the area of the training, or those scoring highly on their applications. Applicants generally must be interested in becoming Certified Peer Counselors for Medicaid billing agencies, as our funding usually does not allow training for other professional development or personal growth. Please note that there are usually far more training requests than there are training spaces. Applicants will be notified whether they have been selected to attend requested training. There are some trainings paid for by other organizations who select applicants differently.

IS THERE A WAITING LIST?

DBHR will invite people who are high priority, especially those who are already employed as peer counselors as soon as possible. There is a waiting list for most trainings. Being selected for a training, though, is not based only on when you apply. Application scores and priorities are also very important. After a year, your application is no longer considered, unless we receive an update.

What are trainings and tests like?

WHAT TYPES OF TRAINING ARE AVAILABLE?

There are currently three Certified Peer Counseling trainings available: Standard training, Family and Youth training, and Spanish training. All trainings result in the same certification. There is a box on the application form to indicate preferences.

Trainings may be sponsored either by the State of Washington or a Regional Support Network. All known training dates and locations are listed on the website. Regional Support Network trainings are limited to participants from a particular region, and may have their own priorities for training.

WHAT IS THE FAMILY/YOUTH TRAINING?

The Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery piloted a new curriculum in Family and Youth Certified Peer Counselor training in 2013. This training, while covering the same topics as the Standard training, is specifically designed to prepare parent and youth Certified Peer Counselors. Parents and youth often benefit from learning with a larger group of their peers. Note that there is no age requirement for the youth training, but applicants are expected to be of a similar age or have substantial experience working with youth. The ability to form truly “peer” relationships is the most important criteria. Parents and youth are welcome to take the Standard training as well. Individuals working on WISE teams are required to take a Family/Youth training, unless an exception is made.

WHAT IS THE APPLICATION PROCESS?

Applicants print and fill out the application form on the website, carefully following all instructions. Applications are sent to DBHR, and after evaluation, a confirmation letter will be mailed to you.

HOW MUCH DOES TRAINING COST?

There is no cost for their peer counseling training, training materials, or the test. Trainings that are offered regionally provide snacks and lunch, while statewide trainings also provide lodging and all meals.

IS THERE TRAVEL SUPPORT AVAILABLE FOR TRAINING?

Most CPC trainings are regional and there is no travel support available. DBHR offers two statewide trainings, and lodging and meals are provided for these trainings. Regional Support Networks do not provide for travel support. For the Youth/Family trainings there are also limited travel support funds available to assist primarily people coming from long distances within the region. Youth/Family applicants should contact WSU for more information. If you apply for a statewide training, the trainer will contact you about your needs.

WHAT IS THE TRAINING LIKE?

All trainings are 36-40 hours in length. Beginning in July 2016, the CPC test will usually be scheduled the last afternoon of the training. Most trainings occur over five days, although a few are split over two weeks or weekends. Students primarily study the peer counselor manual, which includes many individual and group activities. Trainings are interactive, with students expected to participate actively in activities and discussions. Students are also expected to follow the Code of Conduct that allows all students to be safe and successful in the training. To receive a training completion certificate, participants must also pass skill checks during the training.

WHAT IS THE CERTIFIED PEER COUNSELING TEST LIKE?

The DBHR test is administered by Washington State University. The test will be held either at the training location during the week, or at a location near the test location approximately 2-3 weeks after training. The test has a written multiple choice section and an oral section answered to a small panel. Applicants have three attempts to pass the test. They may then request re-training, but this opportunity is not guaranteed.

HOW IS DBHR'S PEER COUNSELING PROGRAM DIFFERENT FROM OTHER PEER PROGRAMS?

Many organizations provide peer support and training. Some examples are NAMI's Peer to Peer, WA Dads, Recovery Innovations training, and CCAR training. Although these programs may be very helpful to individuals, DBHR has no authority or oversight of these programs. The DBHR program of peer support is the only state-approved pathway to qualify an individual to work in a Medicaid agency.

WHO SHOULD I CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION?

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